

significant public consequences. Parents who opt to either stay out of the paid workforce or work part-time lose social security and other benefits. Employers also lose, particularly when trained employees feel they must leave their jobs because they are not given the options of reduced or flexible work hours. Parents (most often mothers) struggle to “do it all”: to have a career and raise children, to have enough money to support the family and enough time to devote to it. *Mothering in America* is not an isolated task, Peskowitz writes—it is deeply engrained into social, cultural, economic, and political issues. Yet these issues are not fully discussed publicly. For the most part, mothering is featured in the media as yet another style issue.

Peskowitz makes a concerted effort to include the concerns of mothers from diverse backgrounds (with the exception of lesbian mothers). She examines the early feminist movement and the split between the concerns of working-class and middle-class mothers. She also attempts to reframe the problem of work-life balance as a parenting problem, rather than a mothering problem, although she acknowledges that the majority of parenting is done presently by mothers.

Consciousness-raising is a powerful tool for changing systems of oppression. Peskowitz challenges us to move beyond the Mommy Wars to make social structural changes that will benefit all parents. She envisions a “playground revolution”: “Motherhood can feel so private, so isolating. How then do we connect it with building new playgrounds and political activism and changing public policy? This is our challenge, the next feminist challenge, the work left to do.”

Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970

The Maternal Dilemma

Ann Taylor Allen
Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005

Reviewed by Fiona Joy Green

In *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970*, history professor Ann Taylor Allen explores the “maternal dilemma” facing women living in western Europe during the twentieth century, namely their ability to be mothers and autonomous individuals. Drawing on her extensive knowledge of women’s history and feminist movements—mainly in Britain, France, Germany, and the Netherlands—Allen pens an enlightening, if non-academic, examination of how motherhood came to be perceived as freely chosen.

The first section of Allen's book considers the pre-First World War years, 1890 to 1914. Chapter one provides an excellent overview of the maternal role as read by feminist scholars who challenged the notion of universal subordination of women and mothers in prehistoric times with a maternalist understanding of motherhood as the highest form of human achievement, thereby confirming women's powerful positions in the private and public realms. Chapters two and three trace efforts made by feminists to increase the legal status of mothers (married or unmarried), and their demands for economic independence for wives and mothers whose subordination was understood to be rooted in their economic dependence on men. Chapter four considers how the view of mothering as public duty contributed to a new definition of motherhood that included personal choice, the reproductive rights of women, and the role of the state in these matters. Chapter five considers the effects of the First World War on feminist approaches to motherhood and reproduction that safeguarded the lives of mothers and children, as well as the independent employment of mothers in traditionally male-dominated jobs.

The interwar years 1918 to 1939 are the focus of the next three chapters, which begin with feminists challenging the social ideal of the full-time mother in a compassionate marriage and acknowledging the triple burden of marriage, motherhood, and employment. They offer a view of motherhood that combines a caring commitment to children and a career, particularly in the dirty thirties when attacks on working mothers increased due to the high rate of male unemployment. Chapter seven addresses birth control movements and their creation of the new ideal of heterosexual marital bliss and parent-child intimacy that undermined the maternalist view of motherhood as a public service. Chapter eight explores feminist responses to the contradictory understanding of motherhood by the emerging field of psychiatry: that motherhood is a normal, biological imperative, but mothers need the advice of experts if they want to avoid harming their children.

The final section addresses three major developments of the period 1945 to 1970: (i) new laws affecting mothers, children, and female reproduction; (ii) the presence of mothers in the labour force; and (iii) the feminist rebellion against maternity. Allen argues that parental rights of mothers, state benefits to families, the legalization of birth control, and psychological theories that redefined motherhood as a finite job rather than a lifetime identity supported a new emphasis on women's personal liberty and self-realization. Allen concludes that the difficulty of reconciling maternal and familial responsibilities with individual aspirations continues today.

For readers interested in social history, policy, law, and feminist movements, this book provides insight into the work of feminists on issues of motherhood, as well as the history of feminism over an era of great social and economic change. It also offers a macro view of the social, political, and economic contexts that shaped the work of feminists.